

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 ATHENS 0842

EXDIS

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SUBJECT: THE MILITARY IN GREECE: DOMINANT POLITICAL POWER AT
THE CROSSROADS--A COUNTRY TEAM ASSESSMENT

1. SUMMARY. THE EMBASSY HAS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED ON THE GREEK POLITICAL MOOD AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE. IN THIS MESSAGE WE LOOK BEYOND THE EXTERIOR APPEARANCES OF GOVERNMENT, TO FOCUS ON THE BASIC POWER STRUCTURE IN GREECE, THE HELLENIC ARMED FORCES. FOR, WHILE THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT, EXCEPT FOR THE PRESIDENT, IS COMPOSED OF CIVILIANS, DECISIVE POWER LIES BEHIND THE SCENE WITH THE MILITARY. EVENTS OF THE LAST NINE MONTHS HAVE HAD A TRAUMATIC EFFECT ON THE MILITARY'S EFFECTIVENESS BOTH AS AN ORGANIZATION AND AS BASIS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY. A SENSE OF CONTINUITY AND MANY OF THE BENEFITS OF EXPERIENCE HAVE BEEN LOST AS THE UPPER RANKS HAVE BEEN DECIMATED BY TOO FREQUENT CHANGE. DISCIPLINE HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY IMPAIRED AS THE MIDDLE RANKS HAVE BEEN POLITICIZED. THE ARMED FORCES NOW CONSTITUTE THE SINGLE GREATEST BARRIER TO STABLE POLITICAL LIFE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE MILITARY ON THE EVENING OF THE COUP. DISSATISFACTION WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN GREECE HAD BEEN GROWING MARKEDLY WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES, PARTICULARLY THE ARMY, IN THE SIX MONTHS OR SO PRECEDING THE COUP OF NOV. 25. DURING THE PERIOD PRELIMINARY TO THE NOVEMBER COUP, HOWEVER, THE SENIOR COMMAND POSITIONS IN THE MILITARY REMAINED IN THE HANDS OF THE FIGURES WHO, ON THE SURFACE AT LEAST, REMAINED LOYAL TO PAPADOPOULOS. THEY WERE PUT THERE,
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MANY ONLY RECENTLY, PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THEIR PRESUMED COMMITMENT TO THE PRESIDENT. IRONICALLY, WHEN THE TEST DID COME, MOST WENT ALONG WITH THE COUP, EVEN IF THEY HAD NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PLOTTING FROM THE BEGINNING. A NUMBER, MORE DEEPLY

COMPROMISED BY THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH PAPADOPOULOS OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME, WERE THEMSELVES TARGETS OF THE COUP. THEY WERE UNABLE TO OFFER ANY EFFECTIVE RESISTANCE AND WERE IMMEDIATELY NEUTRALIZED.

3. WHILE THE MAJORITY OF THE OFFICER CORPS MAY HAVE BEEN NEUTRAL ON THE QUESTION OF MILITARY INTERVENTION, OR AT LEAST WERE NOT INCLINED TO AGITATE FOR IT, A FAIRLY WELL-DEFINED GROUP OF MIDDLE-GRADE AND JUNIOR OFFICERS WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY IMPATIENT WITH THE SITUATION. ALMOST ALL OF THEM WERE DECLARED OR CLANDESTINE FOLLOWERS OF BRIG. GEN. IOANNIDES, THE COMMANDER OF THE GREEK MILITARY POLICE (ESA) AND SELF-APPOINTED WATCHDOG OF PAPADOPOULOS' LEADERSHIP OF THE "REVOLUTION" AT LEAST SINCE 1970.

4. THESE OFFICERS, MANY OF WHOM OWED THEIR POSITION TO IOANNIDES' INFLUENCE WHEN HE SET UP A WATCHDOG GROUP UNDER PRESIDENT PAPADOPOULOS, BELIEVED THAT THE "REVOLUTION" HAD BEEN BETRAYED BY THE MAJORITY OF ITS ORIGINAL LEADERS. MISTAKES HAD BEEN MADE; SOME CONSIDERED THAT THE MILITARY HAD ASSUMED TOO DIRECT A ROLE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND HAD BEEN CORRUPTED BY IT. AS A RESULT THE MILITARY WAS LOSING THE RESPECT OF THE GREEK PEOPLE. ITS PART IN SUCH FRAUDS AS THE JULY REFERENDUM CAUSED IT TO LOSE FURTHER GROUND IN ITS STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN ITS INTEGRITY. THESE EFFECTS WERE MAGNIFIED BY THE CULT OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCREASINGLY BLATANT CORRUPTION.

5. IOANNIDES HAD NEVER MADE ANY SECRET OF HIS INTENTION THAT IF THE DAY EVER CAME IN WHICH IT APPEARED THAT THE PRINCIPLES OF THE 1967 REVOLUTION WERE ABOUT TO BE IRREVERSIBLY COMPROMISED HE WOULD TRY TO REMOVE PAPADOPOULOS FROM POWER. IN HIS ESTIMATION AND THAT OF HIS FOLLOWERS, ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT THE MARKEZINIS GOVERNMENT DID FROM THE DAY IT TOOK OFFICE BROUGHT THAT MOMENT NEARER. THROUGHOUT OCTOBER AND EARLY NOVEMBER, MORALE AMONG THE MILITARY SLUMPED. MORE AND MORE OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS BEGAN TO QUESTION THE ROUTE THE GOVERNMENT WAS TAKING. AND,
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FINALLY, TO CORRUPTION, ANOTHER ISSUE WAS ADDED: A FORMAL RETURN THROUGH ELECTIONS TO THE VERY SAME TYPE OF PARLIAMENTARY REGIME THAT HAD BEEN OUSTED IN 1967. THE STUDENT DISTURBANCES, ACCOMPANIED BY BLOODSHED, FORCED THE MILITARY TO THE FRONT IN THE DISTASTEFUL ROLE OF SAVIORS OF A REGIME THAT HAD ABANDONED THE REVOLUTION. THE CRITICAL LEVEL OF DISSATISFACTION HAD BEEN REACHED. IT WAS THE IDEAL OCCASION FOR IOANNIDES TO MOVE.

6. THE HELLENIC ARMED FORCES TODAY. THE COUP OF NOV. 25 HAS SEVERELY AFFECTED THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ARMED FORCES. WHILE SUCH TRADITIONAL DEFENSE FUNCTIONS AS BORDER DEFENSE STILL GO ON, NO OFFICER IN ANY SERVICE CAN BE CONFIDENT OF HIS POSITION AFTER THE TURMOIL CASUED BY THE RECENT MAJOR UPHEAVALS IN THE

TOP RANKS. THE CONTINUITY OFFERED BY ORDERLY PROMOTION IS COMPLETELY LACKING. OUR MILITARY CONTACTS AND ANALYSIS INDICATES LESSENING OF COMMAND RESPECTABILITY AND THE CREATION OF AN ATMOSPHERE OF UNCERTAINTY WITHIN THE MILITARY.

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7. SENIOR OFFICERS INEXPERIENCED. THREE MAJOR CHANGES IN THE HELLENIC ARMY HIERARCHY OCCURRED DURING THE PERIOD JUNE THROUGH NOVEMBER: ONE CONSISTED OF NORMAL RETIREMENTS AND PROMOTIONS IN JUNE; THE SECOND FOLLOWED THE JULY PLEBISCITE AND THE ELEVATION OF GEN. ANGELIS TO THE VICE PRESIDENCY IN AUGUST; THE THIRD FOLLOWED THE COUP OF NOV. 25. THIS THIRD CHANGE WAS CLEARLY A PURGE AND BROUGHT VERY INEXPERIENCED OFFICERS INTO THE HIGHEST POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP. TODAY, ALL OF THE LIEUTENANT GENERALS, EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE MAJOR GENERALS, ALL OF THE BRIGADIER GENERALS, AND EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE COLONELS IN THE HELLENIC ARMY (THE MAJOR FORCE) HAVE SIX OR LESS MONTHS IN GRADE. NINE OF THE TOP TEN ARMY COMMANDS HAVE HAD THREE INCUMBENTS WITHIN NINE MONTHS; THE OTHER HAS HAD TWO.

8. AT LEAST SIXTY MIDDLE-RANKED NAVY OFFICERS WERE IMPRISONED AND LATER DISCHARGED AS A RESULT OF THE ABORTIVE NAVY MUTINY OF MAY 1973. EVEN BEFORE THEN. THE NAVY'S CAPABILITY AS A FIGHTING FORCE WAS IN QUESTION. THE HELLENIC NAVY NOW FINDS IT NECESSARY TO GIVE MOST MIDDLE GRADE OFFICERS AT LEAST TWO BILLETS, DUE TO THE SHORTAGES IN THESE GRADES.

9. IN THE AIR FORCE, UNREST AT THE SAME TIME BUT UNRELATED TO THE NAVY MUTINY, LED TO THE DISMISSAL OF A NUMBER OF AIR FORCE COLONELS AND LIEUTENANT COLONELS. FOLLOWING NOV. 25, DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE MIDDLE

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RANKS LED TO THE DISMISSAL OF FURTHER KEY OFFICERS-- INCLUDING THE CHIEF, DEPUTY CHIEF AND OPERATIONS DIRECTOR. BECAUSE OF THESE EARLY RETIREMENTS AND FORCED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES, THE HAF LACKS EITHER EXPERIENCED OR INNOVATIVE OFFICERS TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AT THE TACTICAL/OPERATIONAL LEVEL.

10. THE MERRY-GO-ROUND COMINGS AND GOINGS OF SENIOR OFFICERS HAVE SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZED THE HELLENES' ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT LONG TERM PLANNING. THIS HAS BEEN CLEARLY REFLECTED IN JUSMAGG'S DISCUSSIONS WITH SHAFIC REGARDING EQUIPMENT NEEDS IN THE PERIOD AHEAD. THE OFFICERS NOW HOLDING SENIOR COMMAND AND STAFF POSITIONS AT THE HEAD-QUARTERS IN ATHENS SIMPLY DO NOT HAVE THE PREREQUISITE EXPERIENCE TO ORGANIZE AND DIRECT A WIDESCALE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. GIVEN TIME, AND ALLOWANCE FOR ERRORS, THE NEW COMMANDERS SHOULD MASTER THEIR ASSIGNMENTS. WHETHER THEY WILL HAVE THE TIME IN OFFICE AND GRADE TO GAIN THE REQUIRED PROFICIENCY WILL LIKELY DEPEND UPON THEIR ABILITY TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES FROM THE POLITICAL MORASS IN WHICH THEY ARE NOW WALLOWING. CERTAINLY AN ATTACK ON GREECE BY AN OUTSIDE HOSTILE FORCE SUCH AS WARSAW PACT MEMBER WOULD QUICKLY ERASE ALL SIGNS OF INTERNAL GREEK SCHISM AS GREEKS UNITED AGAINST A COMMON ENEMY. BARRING THIS, THE SENIOR MILITARY GIVE NO INDICATION OF HOW OR WHEN THEY WILL FIND THE KEY TO THEIR POLITICAL PROBLEMS.

11. THE MIDDLE GRADES--KEY ROLE IN THE BALANCE OF POWER. THE MIDDLE-RANKING OFFICERS (LT. COLS. AND MAJORS) OF THE ARMED FORCES, ESPECIALLY OF THE ARMY, ARE KEY ARBITERS OF POWER. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE BECAUSE OF THEIR TIES TO THE OPERATIONAL UNITS EQUIPPED TO IMPOSE THEIR WILL. WHO COMMANDS THE OPERATIONAL MILITARY UNITS CAN EFFECTIVELY COMMAND THE COUNTRY. THESE OFFICERS WERE HELD IN LINE FOR OVER SIX YEARS UNDER GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS' LEADERSHIP AND IOANNIDES' PATRONAGE. THEY DEFERRED TO THE HIERARCHY APPOINTED BY THE "LEADER OF THE 21ST OF APRIL REVOLUTION".

THE FALL OF PAPADOPOULOS AT THEIR INSISTENCE AND WITH THEIR
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PLANNING AND SUPPORT HAS GIVEN THEM AN UNFORGETTABLE TASTE OF POLITICS AND POWER. THEY ARE REPORTED TO BE INTENSELY NATIONALISTIC AND APPEAR NOT PARTICULARLY ATTRACTED TO THE NOTION OF EARLY POLITICAL NORMALIZATION VIA THE REESTABLISHMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE INDIFFERENT, PERHAPS EVEN HOSTILE IN INSTANCES, TO "POLITICAL" SOLUTIONS FOR GREECE'S MANY PROBLEMS. CERTAINLY THE COUP HAS INTENSIFIED THEIR ATTITUDE THAT THE

MILITARY, IN THE NAME OF THE "REVOLUTION" CAN OVERRIDE SUCH CONSIDERATIONS AS LAW AND LEGITIMATE POLITICAL POWER. APPEALS APPEARING TO INVOLVE SIMPLY THE RETURN OF "OLD POLITICIANS" ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE WELCOMED. AMONG THE MIDDLE RANKS, THE MAJOR UNIFYING FACTOR ON NOV. 25 WAS THE DESIRE TO REMOVE GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS. AGREEMENT ON A FUTURE COURSE WAS NOT EHN MATERIAL. NOW, THIS GROUP APPEARS TO BE WITHOUT UNITY OF PURPOSE OR DIRECTION. IT IS STILL POSSIBLE THEY WILL BE SWAYED BY EFFECTIVE SENIOR LEADERSHIP, PARTICULARLY IF PERSUADED THAT THE FUTURE OF THE ARMED FORCES, INCLUDING THEMSELVES, COULD BE IRREPARABLY DAMAGED BY THEIR OPEN ASSOCIATION, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNING GREECE IN A TIME OR WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS.

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EXDIS

12. POLITICS AND THE MILITARY.

IOANNIDES AND THE SENIOR OFFICERS COULD PULL THE MILITARY OUT OF ITS MORASS IF THEY COULD UNITE UPON A POLITICAL COURSE FOR THE NATION. MOREOVER, THE STATED INTENT OF THE ARMED FORCES IN ESTABLISHING A "CIVILIAN" GOVERNMENT WHILE THE COUP LEADERS REMAINED IN UNIFORM WAS TO REMOVE THE ARMED FORCES FROM POLITICS. YET, IN FACT, THE APPOINTED GOVERNMENT WAS GIVEN RESPONSIBILITIES WITHOUT SUFFICIENT AUTHORITY TO ACT; THE UNIFORMED LEADERS RETAINED THE AUTHORITY TO ACT WITHOUT CONCURRENT RESPONSIBILITIES. AND, THE PRESIDENT OF GREECE REMAINS A FULL GENERAL ON ACTIVE DUTY. MORE THAN TWO MONTHS AFTER ITS INSTALLATION, THE NEW REGIME STILL HAS NO CLEAR POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC PROGRAM. IT CLEARLY GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF BEING THE ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCH EXECUTING ORDERS AND POLICIES DETERMINED BY THE MILITARY OLIGARCHY. THERE IS OBVIOUS DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SENIOR GENERALS WHO STAND UP FRONT AND THE YOUNGER OFFICERS BEHIND THE SCENES WHO SUPPORTED THE CHANGE AND FEEL THEIR POWER AND VIEWS SHOULD PLAY A KEY ROLE IN GREECE'S FUTURE.

13. THE FAILURE OF A LEADER TO COME FORWARD AND GATHER IN THE REINS AND APPURTENANCES OF POWER (AS GEORGE PAPADOPOULOS DID IN 1967) HAS BEEN THE PREDOMINANT CONTRIBUTOR TO THE MILITARY DISARRAY AND GOVERNMENTAL INACTIVITY. IT IS UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT BGEN IOANNIDES MAKE ALL POLICY DECISION FROM BACKSTAGE. IT IS
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THOUGHT THAT IF THE DOMESTIC SITUATION SO DETERIORATES THAT ANARCHY AND CIVIL DISORDER APPEAR IMMINENT, IOANNIDES WILL TRY TO STEP FORWARD TO TAKE COMPLETE CONTROL. ALTERNATIVELY, HE MAY SEEK CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. HE HAS ALREADY ATTEMPTED TO MAINTAIN HIS LEADERSHIP BONA FIDES BY HOLDING A SERIES OF PEP RALLIES AT MILITARY CAMPS THROUGHOUT GREECE. HIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN ONE OF PERSONAL PRIDE AND DEVOTION TO COUNTRY. HOWEVER, HE IS AUSTERE AND PURITANICAL, HAS NO CHARISMA AND NO VIABLE "NATIONAL VIEW" OF GREEK SOCIETY AND ITS DYNAMICS.

14. IF IOANNIDES DOES MOVE FOR OVERT CONTROL, IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER HE WILL HAVE AS WIDE APPROVAL, OVERT OR TACIT, AS HE DID IN NOVEMBER. HE IS ALREADY TOEING A DELICATE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN THE SENIOR APPOINTED LEADERS AND OTHER, MORE ZEALOUS, MIDDLE GRADE OFFICERS. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT IN TRYING TO RESTORE DISCIPLINE, THE IOANNIDES PEP RALLIES HAVE CREATED MORE DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS. THESE MEETINGS ARE OFTEN REMINISCENT OF GATHERINGS OF A "PRAETORIAN GUARD" OR "COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY." FEW UNIT COMMANDERS CAN BE APPRECIATIVE OF SUCH OVERT FORAYS INTO THEIR AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY.

15. MORE IMPORTANT, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT BEFORE NOV. 25, IN ORDER TO OBTAIN AT LEAST THE TACIT ACCEPTANCE OF MANY MODERATE OFFICERS, IOANNIDES MAY HAVE BANDIED THE POSSIBILITY OF BRINGING KARAMANLIS BACK TO HEAD A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. THIS WOULD HELP ACCOUNT FOR THE ALMOST UNIVERSAL EUPHORIA WHICH PERVADED GREECE IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING NOV. 25. IF TRUE, A SUPPORTER ONCE DOUBLE-CROSSED IS HARDLY LIKELY TO BE FOOLED A SECOND TIME. IN ANY SCENARIO WHICH FORECASTS IOANNIDES REACHING OUT TO SAVE GREECE IN TIME OF IMMINENT DISASTER, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT HE WILL BE ACTIVELY OPPOSED BY THE SAME MODERATES WHO UNTIL NOW HAVE GIVEN HIM LICENSE TO PROCEED.

16. A BLEAK FUTURE? THE POLITICIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES IS ERODING ITS INTEGRITY AS A MILITARY ORGANIZATION. IN CONTRAST TO THE EARLY DAYS OF THE PAPADOPOULOS
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REGIME, THE HELLENIC ARMY DOES NOT STAND UNITED BEHIND ITS LEADER. LOYALTY TO THOSE HOLDING EFFECTIVE POWER HAS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT THAN EFFICIENCY. UNLESS FIRM LEADERSHIP EMERGES, SINGLY OR IN GROUPS, DISSIDENTS CAN NOW LOOK TO THE POSSIBILITY OF REDRESSING THEIR GRIEVANCES BY REPLACING THOSE IN POWER WITH THEIR OWN PATRONS. THE EASE WITH WHICH THE NOVEMBER COUP OCCURRED HAS ALREADY OFFERED ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHER GROUPS TO BEGIN PLANNING THE NEXT ONE. MANY YOUNG OFFICERS HAVE COME TO REGARD A COUP AS A LEGITIMATE--AND FEASIBLE--WAY TO GET WHAT THEY WANT, OR WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE IN GREECE'S BEST INTERESTS. THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN SEVERAL REPORTS OF OFFICERS TALKING IN THIS MANNER. AT THE MOMENT ALL THIS IS JUST TALK, BUT THE READINESS WITH WHICH SUCH IDEAS LEAP TO THEIR MINDS SHOWS THAT THESE OFFICERS MAY BE COMING TO ACCEPT A COUP AS A WAY OF LIFE. AS LONG AS THEY SEE POLITICS AS AN ACCEPTABLE SECOND CALLING, THEY POSE AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE LEADERS, WHO MUST FACE THE REALITIES OF DAY-TO-DAY GOVERNMENT ON THE ONE HAND, AND ON THE OTHER MUST SATISFY THE OFTEN MISDIRECTED NATIONALISTIC IDEAS OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS.

17. UNLESS THE LEADERSHIP PULLS ITSELF TOGETHER, THE MILITARY'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THE STRATEGIES OF POLITICAL POWER-BROKERING, THE ABSENCE OF DISCIPLINE AND THE DEARTH OF LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP MAKE IT SEEM CERTAIN THAT THE HELLENIC ARMED FORCES MAY CONTINUE TO LOSE OVERALL MILITARY-OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS. THE ARMED FORCES ARE A VITAL ELEMENT WITHIN THE EQUATION OF GREEK STABILITY. THEIR INSTABILITY IS REFLECTED THROUGHOUT THE GREEK SOCIETY. UNITED, THE MILITARY MIGHT FIND THE KEY TO AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT WHICH CORRESPONDS TO THE ASPIRATING OF THE GREEK PEOPLE. IN THIS EVENT, THE GREEKS MIGHT EVEN FORGIVE AND FORGET. HOWEVER, UNTIL SOMEONE REESTABLISHES MILITARY DISCIPLINE AND WITHDRAWS THE MILITARY FROM THE DAY-TO-DAY GOVERNMENT, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE BROADER SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH NOW CONFRONT GREECE. AS THINGS NOW STAND, THE GREEK ARMED FORCES HAVE BECOME A SYMBOL OF REPRESSION, TYRANNY, AND DISARRAY. THEIR ASSOCIATION
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IN THEIR PRESENT STATE AND POSTURE WITH NATO AND THE U.S. REMAINS OMINOUS FOR OUR FUTURE SECURITY INTERESTS IN GREECE.
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